Maple Hill Farm

Carter Martin - farming artist

Carter Martin is an artist.

He creates his masterpieces on 280 acres of fertile soil in Appomattox County with a unique style that has been developed and refined through generations of Martins.

Carter is a master artist in his field–growing and curing dark-fired tobacco.

"I believe that you've got to be successful at any job you do," Carter said. "Any you can't measure that success by how many hours you put in each day."

That basic philosophy has been the foundation upon which the 69-year-old farmer has run Maple Hill Farm for more than 36 years, building a reputation for quality in both his tobacco and beef cattle operations.

"Carter is an above-average manager who pays attention to even the smallest detail," James A. Smith, Appomattox County Extension agent, said. "His outstanding tobacco yields and cattle operation are proof of this."

On a four-acre tobacco allotment, Carter raises Type 21 dark-fired tobacco--a variety found in the United States only in Virginia. Its rich, mahogany leaves are noted for their stretch and elasticity, putting them in high demand for cigar wrappers.

"It's one thing to grow dark-fired tobacco, but it's another to cure it," stressed the local Extension agent. "Carter learned well from his family who made it a tradition to produce quality tobacco."

Hickory is the preferred wood used to build fires under the tobacco. However, any dry hardwood is acceptable. It must burn slow and without blazing.

"Once the tobacco has been cut around the first of August and hung in the barn for eight to 10 days, I build six small fires on the floor. As the tobacco starts the process of curing, I increase the number of fires," he explained. "Usually 12 to 15 fires are the maximum I light."

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CARTER AND LOUISE MARTIN, owners and operators of Maple Hill Farm.

CARTER AND LOUISE are often found working together on the farm. Here they team up to dig post holes for a new fence while five-year-old grandson, Matthew, watches.

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APPOMATTOX, VA.

Clarence Jones Farm

Teamwork is key to success

One word can be used to explain the success of the Clarence Jones tobacco farm–teamwork.

Clarence and his wife, Dale, operate the highly-specialized farm as a partnership, working side-by-side from planting through harvest.

The Joneses own and manage the largest tobacco farm in Appomattox County, raising over 60 acres of flue-cured, burley and dark fire-cured tobacco.

"We were both raised around tobacco, so we knew what was involved," Clarence said. "We didn't expand to our present size until ten years ago and we're operating at our peak level now."

In 1981, that level included 48 acres of flue-cured tobacco, 10 acres of dark fire-cured tobacco and two and one-half acres of burley.

Although neither Clarence nor Dale use tobacco products, the three varieties they grow form the backbone of the multi-million dollar tobacco industry.

Flue-cured tobacco is primarily for cigarettes, while dark tobacco is used in the manufacture of snuff and cigars. Burley is used for chewing tobacco and cigarette tobacco.

Due to national overproduction in 1981 and the resulting smaller allotments, Clarence expects to plant fewer acres this year. "Last year I leased around 45 acres from some 20 farmers" he explained. "It's harder to find allotments to rent this year and production costs have also risen."

Demand for the 49-year-old farmer's product has remained about the same. "Cigarette usage is staying stable or increasing very slowly in the U.S.," he noted. "And we're exporting about the same amount as always, about half of the flue-cured crop."

Ed Coppedge, Extension farm management agent in the Appomattox area, has a simple explanation for tobacco's stunted export growth. "We've actually priced ourselves out of the world market," he said. "Because of cheaper labor and lower production costs, some countries can actually produce flue-cured tobacco and sell it 20-30 cents cheaper than we can."

Still, the Jones couple have no trouble selling their product and continually receive top prices at Danville and Brookneal markets. In addition to tobacco, 100 acres of wheat are raised as part of a two-year crop rotation plan on the relatively flat 360-acre farm.

While most farmers raise only one type of tobacco, Dale explained their decision to diversify this way. "By growing three kinds, we can stay busy through the winter months too," she said. "Flue-cured is marketed from August through October and dark-fired and burley between November and January."

The Joneses raise their own tobacco plants–a process that begins in October when the plant beds are tilled, gassed and covered with plastic. The gas fumigates the beds to help control weeds, diseases and insects.

In early March, the plant beds are seeded and covered with cotton cheesecloth. The cheesecloth, which has a greenhouse effect, is removed around May 10 when the seedlings are transplanted in the field.

"Getting a uniform setting of tobacco is the whole key to a good tobacco crop," Clarence revealed. With his two-row mechanical planter. Clarence can plant 5-6 acres each day.

Once the tobacco has reached maturity, it is either harvested by cutting the whole stalk or by pulling the leaves from the stalk as they ripen. "Both burley and dark-fired tobacco are cut whole stalk and hung in conventional barns to cure," Clarence explained. "Burley is cured by air and dark-fired is cured by smoke."

Dark tobacco is smoked over open wood fires for about six weeks, depending upon weather conditions. "Dark tobacco is basically an air-cured tobacco with a little help," Dale offered.

With flue-cured tobacco, three or four leaves are

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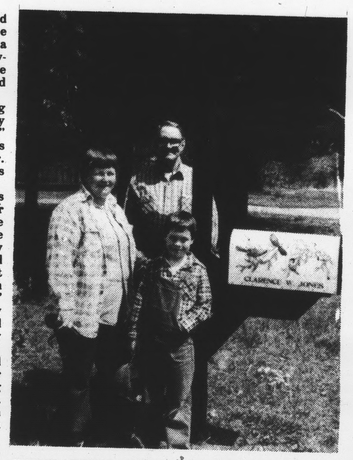
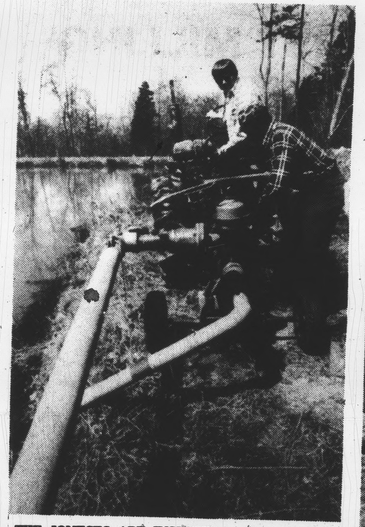


THE CLARENCE JONES family: eight-year-old Bruce, Dale and Clarence.



THE JONESES ARE INSURED an adequate water supply from their two farm ponds. Here Dale and hired hand, George Mitchell, prime the irrigation pump as they prepare to turn the system on.

CLARENCE IS PICTURED at one of five bulk barns on the farm. Each barn costs around $12,00 and can handle 3,000 pounds of cured leaf each week during tobacco harvest season.